

CLAIMS:

1. A method for generating or extending a user interest profile, comprising:

monitoring electronic messages directed to the user;

5 selecting those electronic messages satisfying at least one predetermined condition indicating that they are likely to include information relevant to the user's interests; and

extracting profile data from the selected messages.

2. A method according to claim 1, further comprising storing the
10 extracted profile data.

3. A method according to claim 2, further comprising displaying the extracted profile data to the user and storing only those data indicated by the user.

4. A method according to claim 1, wherein the at least one
15 predetermined condition is constituted by the message having an attachment.

5. A method according to claim 1, wherein the at least one predetermined condition is constituted by the message being a forwarded message.

6. A method according to claim 5, wherein said extracting further
20 comprises operating on words added by a forwarder of the forwarded message.

7. A method according to claim 1, wherein the at least one predetermined condition is constituted by the message including a URL.

8. A method according to claim 1, wherein the profile data comprise one or more keywords or phrases.

9. A method according to claim 1, wherein said extracting further
25 comprises operating on data contained within a subject line of the message.

10. A method according to claim 1, wherein said extracting further comprises operating on an attachment to the message.

11. A method according to claim 1, further comprising using the

extracted data to search an information repository for matching items.

12. An apparatus for generating or extending a user interest profile, the method comprising:

means for monitoring electronic messages directed to the user;

5 means for selecting those electronic messages satisfying at least one predetermined condition indicating that they are likely to include information relevant to the user's interests; and

means for extracting profile data from the selected messages.

13. An apparatus according to claim 12, wherein the at least one
10 predetermined condition is constituted by the message having an attachment.

14. An apparatus according to claim 12, wherein the at least one predetermined condition is constituted by the message being a forwarded message.

15 15. An apparatus according to claim 14, wherein said extracting means operates on words added by a forwarder of the forwarded message.

16. An apparatus according to claim 12, wherein the at least one predetermined condition is constituted by the message including a URL.

17. An apparatus according to claim 12, wherein the profile data comprise one or more keywords or phrases.

20 18. An apparatus according to claim 12, wherein said extracting means operates on one of data contained within a subject line of the message and an attachment to the message.

19. An apparatus according to claim 12, further comprising:

a display for displaying the extracted profile data to the user; and

25 a memory for storing only those data indicated by the user.

20. An apparatus according to claim 12, further comprising means for using the extracted data to search an information repository for matching items.